

Testimony Presented To The Judiciary Committee In Response To:

***HB 5531- An act concerning the care and treatment of persons
with a mental illness or substance use disorder.***

by Margaret Watt, Executive Director
On behalf of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board
March 16, 2016

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I want to express my **opposition to HB 5531**- An act concerning the care and treatment of persons with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

Outpatient commitment is a simplistic response that cannot compensate for a lack of appropriate and effective services in the community. In fact, the enforcement demands of outpatient commitment would divert resources away from treatment.

Data on outpatient commitment indicates that it confers no additional benefit above access to effective community services. Research shows that individuals who are given enhanced community services did just as well as those under commitment orders who had access to the same services.

There are also enormous practical problems in implementation of outpatient commitment. The threat of forced treatment often deters individuals from voluntarily seeking treatment. At best, outpatient commitment undermines the therapeutic alliance between the provider and consumer of mental health services. Greater sensitivity is needed in working with consumers to find the most effective and acceptable treatment.

I urge all members of the Judiciary Committee to oppose HB5531 in order to protect the dignity and self-determination of all individuals.